

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of)	
)	
Revision of the Commission's Rules To Ensure)	CC Docket No. 94-102
Compatibility with Enhanced 911 Emergency)	RM-8143
Calling Systems)	
)	

To: The Commission

REPLY COMMENTS OF SECURE ALERT, INC.

SecureAlert, Inc. ("SecureAlert") hereby files its reply comments in the above-captioned proceeding, regarding the technical feasibility and cost effectiveness of requiring all non-service-initialized mobile wireless phones to provide Public Safety Calling Point ("PSAP") call back capability. In brief, the record in this proceeding shows that the Commission should not impose technical requirements on wireless carriers or handset manufacturers that would result in undermining the many benefits the FCC achieved when it ordered wireless carriers to deliver all 911 calls to PSAPs. One of those benefits is the ability of consumers to choose an affordable multi-function personal safety device such as the Magnavox Mobile911 handset.

I. The Comments Support Adoption of Protective Measures that are Consistent with SecureAlert's Current Practice with the Mobile911 Handset

Numerous commenters, including the Texas 911 Agencies and APCO, support solutions to the non-initialized handset PSAP call back issue that are consistent with SecureAlert's current practice with respect to the Mobile911 handset – namely, educating the consumer through product labeling, and informing PSAPs of the inability of a 911 caller to receive call back through the use of a standard, non-dialable MIN (*i.e.*, 123-456-

7890) that is programmed into each phone.¹ Other commenters find a related solution – public education – to be cost effective and less likely to have unintended negative consequences.² All of these solutions are supported by SecureAlert, since they serve the public interest by ensuring that both consumers and public safety entities have the information they need to make informed choices and to act accordingly. With effective product labeling and education efforts, consumers will be able to make an informed choice of whether they want to pay for a fully functional wireless phone and a monthly service plan in order to have capability for incoming calls, as well as benefit from explicit instructions that are included with every Mobile911 handset.³ PSAPs will immediately be informed when a call is received whether they will need to obtain detailed location information from the caller.

II. The Incidence and Scope of the Need for Call Back Is Still Not Well Understood – The Limited Information in the Record Suggests the Problem Is Too Small to Justify the Cost.

The July 9 comments provide the Commission with little new information regarding the scope of the call back problem—the incidence of wireless 911 calls where PSAP call back capability is required, or the incidence of 911 calls originating from non-

¹ See, e.g., Comments of Texas 911 Agencies at 2, 5. Comments of APCO, NENA and NANSAs at 3. Comments of the North Carolina Wireless 911 Board at 2 (calling for non-initialized wireless telephones to be labeled or marked in a manner that explains how the telephone can be used), Comments of Cingular at 7 (calling for the clear labeling of donor phones combined with continued education of users), Comments of the North American GSM Alliance at 7, Comments of Rural Cellular Association at 4.

² Comments of AT&T Wireless Services at 7, Comments of CTIA at 10-13.

³ In this regard, SecureAlert includes an easy-to-read instruction sheet with each Mobile911 handset which states: “**IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:** Most 911 Call Centers do not have the capability to identify the location of a cellular call, unless the caller verbally provides that information. It is important to immediately identify your location to 911 operators when placing an emergency call to 911. Before saying anything else to the 911 operator, give an address and/or any nearby landmarks to help speed assistance. Do not hang up until instructed to do so by a 911 operator. If your 911 call somehow gets disconnected, Mobile911's yellow “in use” light will turn off. Mobile911 cannot receive calls, so a 911 operator will be unable to call you back. Simply press and hold the 911 button for two seconds to place another 911 call.” The instructions also inform users that Mobile911 is equipped with a “Signal” button that enables the user to monitor signal strength on command without placing a test call to a PSAP.

service-initialized phones. In fact the record in this docket fails to show that the so-called call back “problem” associated with non-initialized handsets is meaningful. According to Sprint PCS, when public safety organizations and the wireless industry formed the Wireless E 9-1-1 Implementation Ad Hoc Group (WEIAD), “the parties agreed that any solution to...the absence of call back capabilities with non-initialized phones should be ‘proportional’ to the frequency of the problem....The WEIAD, including the public safety representatives, agreed that ‘if the percentage of situations where there is no call-back capability is already low (possibly under 2%), there may be little or no justification for further actions....At the time, it was ‘estimated that call back was only used one half of one percent of the time and NENA, APCO & NASNA did not believe that the cost of implementing call back justified the benefits.’”⁴ In the absence of reliable evidence that the “problem” posed by the use of non-service-initialized phones outweighs the significant benefit that tens of thousands of consumers receive from 911-only handsets, the FCC should not impose requirements that are certain to double the cost of their manufacture, and make them unavailable to the very segment of the population that benefits the most from the affordable access to 911 emergency services that the Mobile911 handset provides. SecureAlert does not dispute the value that PSAPs put on having call back capability for *all* 911 calls, nor the sincerity of their beliefs. However, given the actual data, only a tiny fraction of all wireless 911 calls would appear to benefit from having PSAP call back capability. Multiply this fraction by the relatively small percentage of 911 calls that come from non-initialized phones, or the even smaller percentage of 911 calls that originate from a non-initialized “911-only” phone, and the real scope of the PSAP call back “problem” associated with such devices begins to come

⁴ Comments of Sprint PCS at 4.

into focus.

III. Providing Call Back Capability Is Not As Important As Ensuring That All Wireless Phones Are Able to Access Basic 911 Service.

SecureAlert is hardly alone in its belief that providing call back capability is not as important a public safety concern as ensuring that all wireless phones are able to access Basic 911 Service. Cingular Wireless addresses this point directly when it says: “The public interest is better served by providing at-risk individuals with phones capable of calling 911, but lacking call back capability, than no phones at all.”⁵ The FCC affirmed this priority when it determined “that the public interest would clearly be better served by requiring covered carriers to forward all 911 calls.”⁶ Indeed, as CTIA points out, “the Commission achieved significant public safety improvements when it ordered carriers to deliver all 911 calls to PSAPs.”⁷ CTIA further supports its point about the importance of access to 911 emergency calling by citing to the Commission’s statements when it analogized the public interest in allowing non-initialized phones to complete 911 calls with the ability of the public to place a 911 call with no charge from a pay phone.

IV. A Rapid Decline in the Number and Availability of Pay Phones Makes It All the More Important to Preserve the Availability of 911-Only Phones in the Marketplace

The need for affordable mobile access to basic 911 service has become even more important for low income and at-risk Americans who depend on a dwindling number of public pay phones. According to press reports, “the number of pay phones nationwide has plunged to 2.1 million from 2.6 million only five years ago, when the

⁵ Comments of Cingular Wireless LLC at 7.

⁶ Revision of the Commission’s Rules to Ensure Compatibility with Enhanced 911 Emergency Calling Systems, CC Docket No. 94-102, *Order* DA 96-2530 (1997) 10 CR 1088 at 1099 (¶ 33) (*emphasis added*).

Telecommunications Act of 1996 freed the Baby Bells of many obligations to operate ‘public interest’ pay phones in otherwise unprofitable settings.”⁸ Advocates for battered women and the homeless point to statistics showing that more than 5.5 million U.S. households -- including an estimated 25 percent of urban poor households -- do not have basic telephone service (landline or wireless).⁹ Many individuals who live in group homes, halfway houses, rehabilitation centers, and other institutions find pay phones to be a valuable life line, since many shelters do not have the means to provide residents with access to local telephone service – even if needed to call 911. In the face of this growing need from at-risk populations, BellSouth made a rational business decision to eliminate all of its approximately 143,000 pay phones by December, 2002, citing to a sharp decline in pay phone usage. It seems ironic in this context that the increasing popularity of wireless phones is a major contributing factor in the decline of pay phones, and has made it more difficult for at-risk populations to gain access to emergency services.¹⁰ As these news articles document, the decreasing number and availability of pay phones in certain neighborhoods and remote locations will mean that many at-risk individuals who live and work in these areas will have increasingly restricted access to emergency services. Again, those impacted most by this trend are the most vulnerable groups in our society—people with low income, the elderly, and victims of crime. These groups also have the lowest penetration of wireless phone subscriptions, in part because of an inability to pay for wireless service. In light of this trend, it is critical to the public

⁷ Comments of CTIA at 9.

⁸ See Attachment A; *Asheville Citizen-Times*, February 17, 2001.

⁹ See Attachment A; *Bergen New Jersey Record*, “The End of the Line?”, May 6, 2001.

¹⁰ See Attachment A; *TheStreet.com*, “BellSouth to Exit Pay Phone Business”, February 2, 2001.

interest that the FCC ensure the continued availability of devices such as Mobile911 that provide affordable mobile access to basic 911 service.

V. Call Back Proposal of Beta Scientific Laboratory, Inc.

Regarding the call back solution proposed in comments filed by Richard Levine on behalf of Beta Scientific Laboratory, Inc., SecureAlert defers comment until a technical analysis of this new technology is completed.

VI. Conclusion.

The original rationale that led the Commission to promulgate its rules for Basic 911 Service still remains. Universal access to Basic 911 Service is critical to the public interest, and supersedes the need for call-back capability. The Commission should not threaten the basic, yet vital, “safety net” that non-service initialized handsets, and specialized low-cost personal safety devices such as Mobile911, provide to those who cannot afford or otherwise choose not to purchase a wireless service plan.

SecureAlert believes that the public interest would be best served if manufacturers of newly manufactured 911-only handsets followed SecureAlert’s dual practice of encoding a standardized non-dialable “telephone number” in the handset, which provides notice to the PSAP that the 911 caller’s handset lacks call back capability, enabling the PSAP to recognize that location information must be obtained quickly; and disclosing to consumers the absence of call back capability and limitations with each handset. Notably, this solution has gained support from the PSAP community. However, SecureAlert respectfully disagrees with the conclusion of the Texas 9-1-1 Agencies: “If this minimum requirement is not implemented, the Texas 9-1-1 Agencies, with a heavy heart, request the FCC to reconsider and perhaps eliminate the Commission’s

requirement that wireless carriers must forward 9-1-1 calls from NIS [non-initialized service] handsets.”¹¹ It is difficult to imagine how public safety would be enhanced if the estimated 24 million non-service initialized legacy phones—many of which are intended for emergency use and unlikely to be replaced—could no longer access emergency services.

Respectfully submitted,

SecureAlert, Inc.

By: /s/ Michael Bernstein

Michael Bernstein

SecureAlert, Inc.

109 David Lane

Knoxville, TN 37922

Tel. (865) 694-2704 x3104

Fax (865) 694-2720

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¹¹ Comments of Texas 9-1-1 Agencies at 6

Attachment A

*Selected News Reports Regarding
Decline in Availability of Payphone Service*

[Top Stories](#)
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The end of the line?

Sunday, May 6, 2001

By KEVIN G. DeMARRAIS
Staff Writer

To most North Jersey residents, telephones are as much a part of their homes as a mailbox, a television, or the kitchen sink. But for some, especially urban residents, a home phone is a luxury beyond their means.

As a result, even as more and more of their neighbors upgrade to cellphones, pagers, and all sorts of high-tech communication gizmos -- leading to the elimination of nearly a quarter of the nation's pay phones in just four years -- many consumers continue to rely almost exclusively on public phones as a vital link to friends, relatives, jobs, and merchants.

"There's a significant constituency," said Vincent Sandusky, executive director of the American Public Communications Council, a Fairfax, Va.-based trade association representing 1,600 non-Bell-affiliated telephone companies.

More than 5.5 million homes -- including an estimated 25 percent of urban poor households -- do not have basic telephone service. These households rely on pay telephones for all kinds of calls, from the mundane to the emergency, he said.

The dramatic growth in cellphones, especially since 1998, has cut into pay-phone business. The industry peaked at 2.6 million pay phones in the United States in 1996, after new federal regulations opened the market to competition, but by last year the number had dropped more than 23 percent, to 2.06 million, Sandusky said.

At the same time, usage of remaining phones continues to fall, with volume per phone declining from an average of 712 calls a month in 1996 to about 500 now, Sandusky said.

Much of the business has gone to wireless communications. The

number of cellphone subscribers, which was under 1 million until 1987, grew from 69 million in 1998 to 110 million last year, according to the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association, a Washington-based trade organization.

As Barbara Silkworth, president of the New Jersey Pay Telephone Association, put it, "Business is not what it used to be, and not what we would like it to be. But pay phones are still around."

The outlook is bleak enough that one of the nation's largest telephone companies, BellSouth, recently announced it would get out of the pay phone business. BellSouth operated 143,000 pay phones.

"They're just going to walk away," Sandusky said. "They can make more money selling dial tone to pay-phone providers. That's a pretty strong statement about the state of the industry right now."

Maybe so, but pay phones are still important to people such as Eva Beesley of Wallington and Starr ("I'm like Madonna; I have just one name"), who lives in Paterson.

"They're definitely a necessity," Starr said after making a call at a pay phone on Main Street in the bustling South Paterson neighborhood. "I have no phone in my house."

Large segments of the population, particularly in the urban areas -- Newark, Jersey City, the Oranges, Paterson, New Brunswick, Dover, Elizabeth, Trenton, and Camden -- still use pay phones almost exclusively, said Arthur Cooper, the owner of Actel Inc., a Cedar Knolls-based private pay phone owner.

Cooper, whose company owns 300 phones in New Jersey, said his "best guesstimate" is that 20 percent of the people in the inner cities -- where most of his phones are installed -- lack phones of their own.

Even people who can afford monthly payments are sometimes denied phones because of their "inability to maintain a credit relationship," he said. "They are precluded from having cellphones for the same reason."

Verizon Communications Inc. does not require a deposit if the customer had service in the last three years and has good credit, said spokeswoman Lacy Yeatts. But others must pay \$100 or more. The amount is equal to two months' billing for the average New Jersey customer, Yeatts said.

That's Starr's problem. "They wanted \$100," she said. "Prepaid."

But she can afford a pager, so Starr receives messages on her pager, and uses pay phones to get back to callers.

Even as the number of pay phones drops steadily, people in South Paterson have no trouble finding one. There are as many as six on some blocks, bolted to the facades of local businesses or standing atop curbside poles, topped by their easy-to-spot signs. Additional phones are in stores and bars.

Some are owned by the long-established Verizon, , the former Bell Atlantic, and many customers consider those phones the most reliable, Beesley said. But others carry less familiar names, such as Crescent Telephone Co., Phone Tech Inc., or Cooper's Actel. Some of them offer discounted rates.

Pay phones are plentiful in other blue-collar areas dominated by foreign-born residents, such as near the intersection of Anderson and Fairview avenues on the Fairview-North Bergen border, and even in more upscale business districts, such as Main Street in Fort Lee and Cedar Lane in Teaneck.

William Gray invented the unattended coin pay phone in 1889 and installed the first one at a bank in Hartford, Conn. Pay-phone technology didn't change much between 1913 -- with the invention of the three-slot phone -- and 1965, when modern, single-coin models debuted.

The industry changed radically in 1984, when the Federal Communications Commission ruled that local phone companies had to open their networks to competitors. Quickly, the established utilities lost their monopolies. A quarter of the nation's 2 million pay phones are now owned by independents.

But after more than a century of growth, pay phone use is declining, and the phones are becoming hard to find in the suburbs, airports, and college campuses and along highways.

"In Wallington, there are no [pay] phones for four blocks," Beesley said.

And the volume of calls from many of those phones, as well as those at highway gas stations, has fallen, Cooper said. "It's not that the pay phones aren't used at all, but use is on the decline," he said.

When that happens, phone owners pull the plug. It costs a company about \$2,000 for equipment and installation and to procure a location, and there are ongoing costs for line rentals and commission to the site's owner, Cooper said.

Blame it on the dramatic growth in wireless use over the last 2 1/2 years or so, said Paul Francischetti, vice president of marketing and business development for Verizon's public communications group.

"There's no question. This is a tough business and it has become even tougher," Francischetti said.

Although wireless use was cutting into pay phone business for years, the impact has been greatest since the fall of 1998, he said. "That's when the real [cellphone] price wars erupted, with flat rates, nationwide coverage, free minutes. That's when the curve started changing. We saw a real dramatic change in wireless use, and that translated into a downward trend in pay phone usage."

Even with the slippage, and Bell South's decision, Verizon has no intention to exit the business, Francischetti said.

"We have different market demographics than Bell South, the kind of core users of pay phones," he said. "We tend to have more larger urban areas, we tend to have more people who still use pay phones, and use them frequently," he said.

Pay phones also remain important for "a significant segment of the working population," and it's not just the "unsubscribed," like Starr and Beesley, who don't have land-lined phones.

There also are people who don't have access to a phone at work, and for whom cellphones are impractical, Francischetti said.

"I come to work, and have access to a phone on my desk," he said. "But a large segment of the population, mostly blue collar, factory, restaurant, or service industry workers, have no access to a phone, except a pay phone in the break room or cafeteria."

There also are "wireless gap" users, who turn to pay phones because their cellphones don't work, Francischetti said. "Ten years ago, they used pay phones and wireless only when couldn't find one. Nowadays, we're seeing that kind of reversed. The 'gap' phone is the pay phone."

"It's great when your [cellphone] batteries die," said Mustafa Tugezin of Paterson, who said he uses public phones often.

Pay phones also are important in group homes, halfway houses, rehabilitation centers, and other institutions that can't afford to supply all their residents' communications needs, said Elaine Meyerson, executive director of Shelter Our Sisters, a Bergen County residence for women who are victims of domestic violence.

Residents rely on pay phones, Meyerson said. "They need to communicate about jobs, housing, and it gets very costly."

Heavy users also include the "pre-adult" market, a segment that cuts across socioeconomic lines, and people at airports and railroad and

bus stations.

"Most of those places are dominated by multiple banks of phones, never a single phone, and we're starting to see the banks getting smaller," Francischetti said.

"Maybe five years ago, three years ago, they needed five pay phones in a bank. Now they need only four. A lot of the decline [in the number of pay phones] is reflective of the number of phones in banks."

That's what happened at Ramapo College in Mahwah. Two years ago there were 71 pay phones on campus; and now there are 36, including four in a new building, said spokeswoman Bonnie Franklin.

The reason? They weren't profitable.

Staff Writer Kevin G. DeMarrais' e-mail address is
demarrais@northjersey.com

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BellSouth exit from pay phone business to leave some cut off

By Bruce Meyerson, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Germmy handsets. Jammed coin slots. Inflated calling rates. There are plenty of reasons not to use pay phones, especially with mobile phones growing ever cheaper for daily use.

The nation's big local phone companies, which also happen to triple as the nation's biggest pay phone and wireless operators, couldn't agree more - a point made clear by BellSouth Corp.'s abrupt decision to ditch all 143,000 of its pay phones by the end of 2002.

While many states are already facing a sharp drop in pay phones - a half million have vanished from the national landscape over the past five years - few envisioned having to deal with the void created by a full-scale pullout by one of the Baby Bells.

So far, there's been no official protest of BellSouth's move by federal or local agencies, though state regulators say they're determined to maintain a minimum level of pay phone access as a matter of public safety and basic services.

Certainly, with more than a third of the U.S. population toting around mobile phones, many people have a handy alternative.

But often enough, there's still no good substitute for a pay phone, both in the remote areas where the slow trickle of calls makes it hard to generate profits, and in the high-usage urban centers, where phones are prone to costly vandalism and fraud.

Cellular service is scarce in the swamps of Louisiana and other remote areas in the nine-state region in the Southeast served by BellSouth.

And nationwide, nearly 6 million homes don't have local phone service, with seven of the BellSouth states ranking among the weakest penetration levels in the country.

"I can tell you that not everyone has a phone or cellphone," said Christine Norwood, manager of an Amoco gas station in Jackson, Miss. With two colleges and several apartment buildings nearby, the station's BellSouth phones take in some serious change.

"It's busy out there at certain times of the day - around

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BellSouth exiting from pay phone business

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BellSouth to Exit Pay Phone Business

By Yi Ping Ho
Staff Reporter
2/2/01 2:46 PM ET

BellSouth (BLS:NYSE - news) has decided to pull out of the pay phone business, in part because of a sharp decline in pay phone usage.

The Atlanta-based telecom provider said it would start exiting the business immediately. The company expects to complete the move by December 2002. The company said the decision will allow it to focus on its core broadband, Internet and digital network products, as well as domestic wireless data and voice business and operations in Latin America.

The company has about 143,000 pay phones in the southeastern U.S.

Bellsouth also said its evaluations indicate that customers "are opting for the new technology options" the company provides, including wireless telephones and interactive pagers.

Shares of BellSouth recently lost \$1.75, or 4.1%, to \$41.25 in afternoon trading on the **New York Stock Exchange**.

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Pay phones becoming a thing of the past Advertisers won't invest in service

By ANDI ATWATER, aatwater@news-press.com

Pay phones have come a long way since the late 1800s, when station supervisors w until he paid for his phone call.



TODD STUBING / The News-Press

CHATTING IT UP:

Beverley Weston, 37, from Fort Myers, laughs as she talks on a pay phone in the East Fort Myers Shopping Center on Palm Beach Blvd. on Sunday, July 15. The phone costs 35 cents for every 15 minutes of local calls.

Click on image to enlarge.

Today, cell phones are threatening the existence of pay p that has caught the attention of phone companies, pay ph who don't want to pay to provide the service.

In this survival game, the public stands to lose the most. call, just finding a pay phone may become the biggest cha

In Lee County, at least two dozen pay phones have disap of a dwindling market that attracts neither advertisers nor

For many residents, pay phones are the only source of co diaper runs and socializing.

"People always need a pay phone," said Fred Zigler, 38, used a pay phone at a gas station. "If your phone's not w call a cab — people use pay phones."

In Florida, industry officials say nearly 500,000 househol service — or 7 percent of the population.

Eight pay phones as part of a 20-phone deal with Lee Co apart in March when Payphone Advertising Media couldn cover the expense.

As a result, pay phones were pulled this year from several public parks, including th Regional Park in Alva, Lehigh Community Park and Lynne Hall Regional Park on F

"The reason we wanted pay phones in some of the parks was for security, emergen John Yarbrough said.

"But they couldn't even get advertising for them. And we haven't received a single from people saying, 'Hey, where's the pay phone?' The vast majority of individuals

The wireless industry is booming.

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The wireless industry is booming.

According to the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, there were more subscribers at the end of 1999. That's more than 31 percent of the U.S. population.

Today, the association counts nearly 120 million U.S. cell-phone subscribers and uses them daily.

Following deregulation of the pay-phone industry in 1996 and the subsequent popularity of cell phones, usage and profits began falling for pay phones around 1998 — about 14 percent of the population.

"That's millions and millions of dollars," said Jim Smith of Verizon Florida, which operates pay phones in the state.

"With wireless, calling cards, dial-arounds (toll-free calls) — people aren't putting money into pay phones."

The vanishing pay phone is a national trend, underscored by phone companies raising pay phone rates and business altogether.

BellSouth Corp., which handles about 60 percent of Florida's phone service and more than 50 percent in the eastern United States, is exiting the pay phone business by the end of 2002.

"There's always going to be some market for pay phones, but there's been a realization that they can't carry their own weight," said Spero Canton, a BellSouth manager in Miami. "What we're doing is taking place ... and had to make some strategic decisions."

The Texas-based SBC Communications, which provides phone services to 13 states, announced earlier this month that it was increasing its pay phone fees to 50 cents a call.

The move, the company says, was to keep as many pay phones in service as possible.

"The adjustment was necessary to address mounting costs and the continuing drop in pay phone usage as alternative communications, including wireless phones, ..." officials said on July 6.

Pay phone rates in Lee County range from 25 cents to 50 cents a call, depending on the location.

Sprint, which handles nearly all telephone service in Lee County and Southwest Florida, has announced a reduction in the number of pay phones over the past two years. Officials wouldn't say how many they plan to remove.

A decline in profits has caused the company to rethink where it wants to place pay phones and to remove them.

"What we did is go back and look at the phones and the cost of upkeep, service and the profit margin," Duff said. "Those not making the profitability threshold, repeatedly, came out."

A few years ago, G & M Pay phones co-owner Marc Joseph had a deal with Cape Coral to place pay phones in the parks.

Every single one of them was unprofitable and over a year and a half, the company decided to remove the phones, Joseph said.

Only one or two self-sustaining phones remain as well as three others the city is keeping.

Even a deal to put four pay phones in the new multimillion dollar Cape Coral City Center mall a month after the pay phones were installed.

"There's been a huge shift in the industry — you can't just put them out and make money," Joseph said. "The industry has been seriously impacted by the cellular phone. The future is uncertain."

Pay phone providers today must think of what places have the highest traffic potential and lease a pay phone just to provide a public service.

If a pay phone isn't grossing at least \$100 a month, it's not worth the trouble, Joseph said.

About the only place left that phone providers fight to win contracts are convenience stores with high phone traffic.

Offering store owners cash bonuses and other incentives in exchange for the pay phone is one way to get business.

In other places, pay phone owners are requiring business owners to pay them.

"It's very cut throat," Joseph said. "It's just real tough making money in the pay phone business."

At the end of 1998, more than 119,000 pay phones dotted Florida. By the end of 2000, there were only 16,000 pay phones.

The same goes for licensed pay phone providers. In 1998, there were 1,119 providers. By the end of 2000, there were only 714, according to the Florida Public Telecommunications Association.

Angela Green, the association's general counsel, is fighting on behalf of pay phone providers.

She said there's a wholesale war raging across the state where discrimination is a factor.

Green listed 24 towns, cities and counties — including Lee — where governments are considering ordinances that prohibit outside public pay phones on private property, stores and residential neighborhoods.

"There's a general attitude that nobody uses those phones but undesirables," Green said. "We want to get rid of the problem."

Green's fighting on behalf of the pay phone industry to keep phones on private property in West Palm Beach, where ordinances have banned them on the grounds that the pay phones fuel crime.

"They don't like some of the people that hang around pay phones so they want to get rid of them," Green said. "The pay phone user of today, on average, is a little poorer, a little darker and not as educated. But the pay phone is incapable of discriminating — and it is valuable to the people."

Stalwart relics they may be, but the endangered pay phone is a lifeline for many in Lee County.

Oscar Cruz, a West Palm Beach laborer working in Fort Myers, strolled this week for a pay phone.

pay phone at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Oak Street in Pine Manor.

The phone, at 25 cents a local call, is his only line to friends, employers and his girlf

“Cell phones cost a lot of money,” Cruz, 40, said. “I don’t have that much money a am living.”

The pay phone, on the corner of a residential street bound by oak trees and duplexe spotting the lower-income neighborhood.

A year ago, the phones were in danger of getting yanked by county officials in a co dropped.

Despite the obstacles facing pay phones today, experts say that the utility never will

Cell phone batteries go dead and transmissions get static. Pay phones are used for e reliable and clear. Visitors to Florida, which relies heavily on tourism, are some of t phones.

The challenge today is for pay phone service providers to come up with new ways t make a profit.

They call it “managing their assets” and coming up with creative marketplace strate

“It’s scary right now because the arrow keeps pointing down,” said Verizon’s Smit to have pay phones in place. At some point, technology will equalize and we’ll be a marketplace.”

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Chairman Michael Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-B201
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-A302
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-A204
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Gloria Tristani
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-B201
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Kevin Martin
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-C302
Washington, DC 20554

Thomas J. Sugrue, Chief
Wireless Telecommunications Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Lauren M. Van Wazer
Commercial Wireless Division
Wireless Telecommunications Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-B201
Washington, DC 20554

Jane Phillips
Wireless Telecommunications Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Kris A. Monteith, Chief
Policy Division
Wireless Telecommunications Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW, Room 8-B201
Washington, DC 20554

International Transcription Service
1231 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Richard C. Levine
Beta Scientific Laboratory, Inc.
P.O. Box 836224
Richardson, TX 75084-6224

Carl Hilliard
Wireless Consumers Alliance
P.O. Box 2090
Del Mar, CA 92014

Rupaco T. Gonzales, Jr.
Patricia Ana Garcia Escobedo
The Gonzales Law Firm
One Westlake Plaza
1705 South Capitol of Texas Highway
Austin, TX 78746

Jerome K. Blask
Michael K. Kurtis
Kurtis & Associates, P.C.
2000 M Street, N.W., Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

Mike Heavener
Independent Cellular Services Association
Box 2171
Gaithersburg, MD 20886

Douglas I. Brandon
AT&T Wireless Services, Inc.
1150 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Howard J. Symons
Michelle M. Mundt
Bryan T. Bookhard
Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky,
and Popeo
701 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 900
Washington, DC 20004

James Murrell
c/o Voicestream Wireless Corporation
401 9th Street, N.W., Suite 550
Washington, DC 20004

Michael F. Altschul
Cellular Telecommunications & Internet
Association
1250 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036

Luisa L. Lancetti
Sprint PCS
401 9th Street, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20004

Jeffrey M. Pfaff
Sprint PCS
Mailstop: KSOPHI0414-4A426
6160 Sprint Parkway, Building 9
Overland Park, KS 66251

Robert G. Oenning, Administrator
Washington State Enhanced 911 Program
Camp Murray, Building 20
Tacoma, WA 98430-5011

Sylvia Lesse
John Kuykendall
Kraskin, Lesse & Cosson, LLP
2120 L Street, N.W., Suite 520
Washington, DC 20037

J. R. Carbonell
Carol L. Tacker
David G. Richards
Cingular Wireless LLC
5565 Glenridge Connector, Suite 1700
Atlanta, GA 30342

Robert M. Gurs
Shook, Hardy & Bacon, LLP
600 14th Street, NW, #800
Washington, DC 20005

James R. Hobson
Miller & Van Eaton, PLLC
1155 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036-4306

Ronald P. Hawley
North Carolina Wireless 911 Board
P.O. Box 17209
Raleigh, NC 27619-7209

Martha Jenkins
Craig Donaldson
Intrado Inc.
1225 I Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005